

HISTORY OF CALIFORNIA STATE PARKS

Edited by Vernon Aubrey Neasham

ARMSTRONG REDWOODS STATE PARK

State Park No. 20

by

George Tays

Written under auspices of Works Progress Administration  
Official Project #465-03-3-133

for

State of California, Department of Natural Resources

Division of Parks

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Armstrong Redwoods Grove is a tract of redwood forest land which contains 395.4 acres of the finest redwood trees in the state. It is situated some two and a half to three miles north of Guerneville near the Russian River. Its geographic location is latitude  $38^{\circ} 31'$  north, longitude  $123^{\circ}$  west. Most of the land is level which makes it most desirable as a natural park.

Explorations in this part of the territory did not begin with the coming of the Spaniards to California in 1769 nor even with the establishment of the Russian settlements at Bodega and Fort Ross in 1812. There are no records extant of any Russian explorations inland along the Russian River and none were made by the Spaniards from San Francisco Bay to the north by way of Sonoma Valley.

The first known expedition made by white men into the upper Russian River Valley consisted of Spaniards under the leadership of Captain Luis Argüello. It took place in the late summer of 1821. Governor Solá hearing that a party of English or American trappers had established themselves somewhere within forty or fifty leagues of San Francisco determined to send out an exploring expedition to ascertain the truth, and to drive out the unwelcome visitors. A



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company of thirty-five cavalry men and twenty infantry men was assembled at San Francisco. Captain Luis Argüello was placed in command aided by Ensign Francisco de Haro, Ensign José Antonio Sanchez, Cadet Joaquín Estudillo, and Father Blas Ordaz as Chaplain and chronicler, while John Gilroy was the English interpreter. The expedition set sail from San Francisco on October 18, 1821 at 11 A.M. in two launches which took it as far as Carquinez. From there they marched overland into the west side of the Sacramento Valley and traveled north to about the latitude of Red Bluff until October 30th. On the 31st they turned and traveled west until they reached the Coast Range. They crossed over the divide and into the valley of the Trinity River which they followed south for nine days. On November 10th they climbed over a range and down into the Russian River Valley. They followed the river south perhaps passing near Armstrong Redwood Grove and continued past what is now Santa Rosa and Sonoma arriving at San Rafael at noon of November 12, 1821. The expedition was back at the Presidio of San Francisco by noon of November 15th after a journey of great hardships over the Coast Range.<sup>1</sup>

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what is at present Sonoma County in 1823 when Misión San Francisco Solano was founded, and during later years, none seem to have gone as far north as the Russian River. In May of 1833 Ensign Mariano Guadalupe Valléjo with a small party of men conducted an expedition to Bodega and Fort Ross and on the return explored as far inland as the present site of Santa Rosa but did not go north of the Russian River at that point. It was not until 1836 when Valléjo had taken command of the frontier post at Sonoma that expeditions beyond the Russian River were made. From 1836 to 1842 numerous campaigns against hostile Indians were carried on by Mariano G. Valléjo and his brother Salvador with the aid of Chief Solano and his tribes of friendly Indians. These campaigns often went as far north as the Russian River in the vicinity of the present Armstrong Redwoods Park. Several raids extended well into the present Mendocino County. It was not until after 1836 that the Russian River Valley became known to the white settlers to any extent.<sup>2</sup>

By 1845 there were a number of settlers with ranches in the vicinity of Santa Rosa and Russian River. Some of these were Mark West, John Wilson, Henry Fitch, John

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C. Cooper, Julio Carrillo and Joaquin Carrillo. No doubt some of them must have traveled into the redwood country of the Russian River but no accounts of it have come to light.<sup>3</sup>

After the conquest of California when Lieutenant Joseph W. Revere was in command of the military forces at Sonoma in 1846, he conducted an exploring party from Sonoma to Clear Lake. Then from the north end of the Lake his expedition crossed over the western ridge into the valley of the Russian River. The party entered the valley a few miles south of Ukiah and proceeded down the valley stopping at the various ranches. They spent several days at Sotoyome ranch belonging to Captain Fitch located where the town of Healdsburg now stands. There they crossed to the west side of the river and continued through the redwood forests to the vicinity of Guerneville where they recrossed the river. This was in the month of September 1846 when they returned to Sonoma.<sup>4</sup>

The next expedition of note to pass through the Russian River region and Armstrong Grove was that led by Dr. Josiah Gregg. This party entered the valley of the Trinity River from the upper Sacramento Valley in November 1849 and for several months struggled through the Redwood forests of

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3. Robert A. Thompson, History of Sonoma County, 13.

4. J. W. Revere, A tour of duty in California, 119-147.



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After 1850 the Russian River Valley began to fill up with settlers very rapidly. In 1852 H. G. Heald laid out the town of Healdsburg, and in 1850 Santa Rosa was established.<sup>6</sup> By that time the Redwood forests along the river had become well known, and settlers began to take up timber claims along the Russian River. Sonoma County was incorporated in April 1851, and at that time included the wild

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5. L. K. Wood. "Discovery of Humboldt Bay," Quarterly, Society of California Pioneers, IX, No. 1, March 1932, 7-64.

6. Bancroft, op. cit., VI, 506-508.



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territory now forming Mendocino County, which was made into a separate county in 1859. At this early date Sonoma County had four townships one of them being Russian River. There were a number of large ranches in this township but most of them were on the east and south side of the river. The Redwood forests on the north side were free land and were taken up by the lumber companies in the later years. Most prominent among those lumbermen were George Guerne, for whom the present Guerneville is named, Thomas T. Heald and Colonel James B. Armstrong. The latter had a tract of 420 acres several miles north of Guerneville, with a stand of some 20,000,000 board feet of timber. He later donated all but twenty-five acres of this tract to the county as a park.<sup>7</sup>

Before the white settlers arrived in the Russian River Valley, the country had been occupied for centuries by the Pomo Indian nation. Several villages were located in the vicinity of Guerneville and Armstrong Grove. In the main these Indians lived along the river because the gloomy interior of the forest did not attract the Pomo. The woods did not provide enough to eat; deer and acorns in a few spots, were the only sustenance they found. Therefore, the redwood belt was only a hinterland, owned but little used by the

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7. T. Gregory, History of Sonoma County, 196-198; R. A. Thompson, History of Sonoma County, 28-32.



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Indians. But in the more open country of the Russian River Valley the savages found a region to their liking because of the mildness of the climate and the diversity of its products. There was fishing in winter, plenty of small game the year round, a moderate supply of deer, acorns everywhere, and brush, grass, weeds, and bulb plants of many species yielding ready food. There was where the bulk of the Pomo population lived.<sup>8</sup>

The village was the political unit in which lived a chief recognized by all members of the groups. Within the tract claimed by the community everyone belonging to it was at liberty to hunt, fish or gather plant food without limitations of private ownership as among the northwestern tribes. The boundaries of the land owned by the group were however definite; and as regards other groups, the rights of property and utilization were clearly established. In case of amity and abundance these rights might be waived.<sup>9</sup> Little is known about wars between the Pomo nation and their neighbors to the north, east and south, but it would appear that as a rule they were peaceably inclined. It is estimated that before the white people came there were about 8,000 Pomo

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Indians in the territory comprised by the present Sonoma and Mendocino counties, and by 1910 there were still 1,200 reported in the census.<sup>10</sup>

The dress of the Pomo Indians was very simple. The men went naked or wrapped a skin around the hips. Women's clothing was scarcely more elaborate; the one article of regular wear other than ornaments was the double skirt. Wherever deer were available, this was of skin; but the commonest form was of shredded inner redwood bark, willow bark, and tule rushes respectively on the coast, in Russian River Valley, and on Clear Lake. The Pomo were the first people in the northern section with whom the fiber skirt seems to have been standard. Basketry caps were not made or worn. The Pomo carrying net was woven into a broad band in front to ease the strain on the forehead. Besides the clumsy soft-soled moccasin usual in California, sandals and leggings of tule and perhaps of netted string were worn by the Pomo. As a rule no Californian, except perhaps in the desert wore any footgear habitually. Men wore ear tubes of long incised bird bones, or wooden rods tipped with a bead and small brilliant feathers. The nose was pierced for the use of a pin or shaft.<sup>11</sup>

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10. Kroeber, Handbook of the Indians of California, 235-239.

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The dwellings built by the Pomo depended upon the climate and vegetation of each district. On the Russian River the Pomo erected a framework of poles, bent together at the top, and thatched with bundles of grass. These were attached to horizontal poles on the frame and each course clamped down by another horizontal stick. The shape of the structure was sometimes circular, perhaps more often rectangular, or even "L" shaped. The door was at the end and a long narrow slot along the middle of the top served as smoke hole. A house of this sort shed the winter rains, but scarcely lasted into a second season. It could be built of ample size, and often accommodated several families.<sup>12</sup>

It is said that the Pomo Indians made the finest baskets in California. Though that may not be absolutely correct nevertheless Pomo basketry had undergone a special development quite unparalleled in California. The Pomo were the only people in California to employ lattice twining. They also made use of wickerwork. They coiled and twined to about an equal extent. Their boiling receptacles were usually twined, their feathered and gift baskets chiefly coiled. Their twined baskets had red patterns only; the coiled ones either red or black.

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The Pomo were the principal purveyors of money to Central California. The chief source of supply was Bodega Bay, where large clams abounded. The shells were broken up, ground approximately round on sandstone, bored, strung, and then finished by being rolled on a slab. Their value varied according to the diameter of the disks; according to their thickness; and also to the degree of polish. Old strings had a higher value than new ones.

The Pomo form of government was very different from that of other Indian groups. The official authority was vested in a council of chiefs. Each political unit had a great chief who was the head of his community and the surrounding villages. Each of the villages had a lesser chief who formed a member of the council. The office of great chief was hereditary, while that of lesser chief might pass to any near blood relatives. The minor chiefs however, did not represent political or geographical units, but consanguineous ones. They met in a sort of informal council that cooperated with the head chief.

Tribal customs among the Pomo were also quite different than those of other nations. They burned their dead instead of burying them, but the ceremony was very simple. The widow cut or burned off her hair and smeared her forehead with pitch and ashes. Seed or acorn meal was sprinkled to the dead for some time after their burning. It is said



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that the Pomo sometimes strangled the decrepitly aged with a stick pressed down at each end, but since they had plenty to eat, as a rule, this practice must have been rare. When a baby was born he was subjected to a prolonged steaming and washing. The mother and father were confined to the house for some days and even after going out would avoid mingling with any crowd. The man did not go hunting for two or three months. The Pomo made no special observance of adolescence such as was practiced by many other tribes.

Marriage was by exchange of gifts rather than true purchase. The groom presented gifts to the parents-in-law and they would reciprocate, but there was no fixing of values, no admitted property right in the wife. After the first gifts were made the husband lived at the bride's home. Then after a month or two the couple went to the husband's house escorted by the bride's family with gifts for the inmates. Thereafter the newlyweds divided their time between their parents' homes taking gifts to them each time they moved. Usually when the first child was born they made their home permanently with one or the other of the parents or else established a separate home for themselves.

The Pomo were very good mathematicians and could count into the hundreds. Using 100 as a unit they also reckoned into the thousands. Nevertheless in spite of their ability in that direction they carried on only limited trade



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relations with other people.

Their religion was conducted by medicine men who had a complex system of rituals, dances and superstitions. They had one high and wise deity called Madumda, in the sky, who had a younger brother, the coyote, on earth. The coyote was the real creator of all things on earth. He it was who transformed the animals into their present condition.<sup>13</sup>

The animals which the coyote presented to the Pomo for their food and other purposes were the elk, deer, bear of several varieties; chiefly the grizzly, fox, rabbit, squirrel, mole, and other small rodents. These were plentiful in Sonoma County along the Russian River Valley. When the white people came most of the larger game animals were exterminated. Of those only the deer saved by strict game laws, survive.<sup>14</sup>

The bird life of the Armstrong Redwoods region is more profuse than the animals. Dozens of varieties of birds may be found there throughout the year. Due to the mildness of the climate a large proportion of them are permanent residents, but the birds that stop there while migrating are also quite numerous. Among those living there all year are quail,

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13. Kroeber, Handbook of the Indians of California, 242-271.

14. J. Mailliard, Field work among the birds and mammals of the north coast of California, 26-50.



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 14. J. M. Miller, Field work among the birds and mammals of the north coast of California, 25-30.



doves, wrens, warblers, numerous species of hawks, sparrows, woodpeckers, black birds, humming birds, finches, and thrushes. The birds visiting at different seasons are represented by a great variety of water fowl, wading birds, robins, and other kinds of song-birds.<sup>15</sup>

Adding to the beauty of the Armstrong Park area are a great variety of wild flowers that appear early in the spring. Though the different species do not number so many as in the Humboldt region, nevertheless the beauty of those present is just as great. The more common flowers found in the Russian River country are virgin's bowers, California buttercups, columbine, larkspurs, California poppy, bleeding heart, wild mustard, Johnny jump-up, wild hollyhock, California vetch, California wild rose, ivywood, western goldenrod, purple thorn apple, morning glory, calypso, fawn lily, pussy's ears, coast lily, lupine, rhododendrons, and many others. There are also a great number of members of the fern family to be found in the damp shadows of the redwood forests.<sup>16</sup>

Besides the wild flowers and shrubs the Russian River Valley has a large variety of trees, the most common

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15. Mailliard, Field work among the birds and mammals of the north coast of California, 10-75.

16. P. B. Kennedy, Annotated list of the wild flowers of California, 13-160.



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15. McIlhenny, Field work among the birds and mammals of the north coast of California, 10-15.
  16. P. B. Kennedy, annotated list of the wild flowers of California, 13-150.



of these are the willow of different kinds, cottonwood, Coast live oak, tan oak, black oak, knobcone pine, white fir, lowland fir, California nutmeg, California laurel, big leaf maple, madroña, and most important of all the Coast redwood.<sup>17</sup>

In Sonoma County one of the main attractions for the white settlers after the "gold rush" was the wealth to be derived from the lumbering of the redwood forests along the coast range and especially in the Russian River Valley. The redwoods had been discovered by the Spaniards of the Portolá expedition near Santa Cruz in 1769. However, the Spaniards and Mexicans up to 1846 made but limited use of the redwood as a source of lumber. It was not until the Americans began to arrive in great numbers after the conquest that the great value of redwood lumber was recognized. Timber claims were taken up along the Russian River as early as 1852, when several small sawmills were established. It was not until after 1870, however, that lumbering on a large scale began. A number of timber claims were taken up in the vicinity of Guerneville among them being those of W. H. Willets 160 acres, H. T. Hewitt 160 acres, R. B. Lunsford 200 acres, Heald & Guerne, 360 acres, Ike and Tom Smith 120 acres,

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17. W. L. Jepson, The Silva of California, 3-279; also Kennedy op. cit., 118-125.



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17. W. L. Jepson, The Silva of California, 3-279; also Kennedy op. cit., 118-122.



and the largest one that of J. B. Armstrong for 420 acres.<sup>18</sup>

Colonel James B. Armstrong the donor of Armstrong Redwood Grove, was born in Baltimore, Maryland, May 7, 1828. His grandfather Joshua Armstrong served as a soldier in the Twenty-seventh Regiment, Maryland Sharpshooters, and was killed at the battle of Baltimore on September 12, 1814. James' father was Daniel Armstrong and his mother was Ann Weldon; they died at Baltimore in 1836 and 1838 respectively. In 1840, James entered the navy of the United States as a "prentice boy," and served under Admiral D. G. Farragut, Commodore Morris, and Captain Bell on board of the line-of-battle-ship Delaware and the steamer Union until 1845. During those years he visited South America, Spain, Portugal, France, Italy, Africa, Florida, Texas and Mexico. After he was discharged he learned a trade and was working at it in 1846 when the war with Mexico began. He then enlisted in a volunteer Company "A", First Maryland, D. C. Volunteers, commanded by Colonel William H. Watson. He arrived at the Rio Grande on July 2, 1846 and served in General Taylor's army in Mexico.

He was present at the capture of Monterey in September 1846 and also at the fall of Victoria. After two years service in Mexico he returned home with General Watt's

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18, R. A. Thompson, History of Sonoma County, 28-32, J. P. Munro-Fraser, History of Sonoma County, 27-28.



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division on June 12, 1848 by way of New Orleans, St. Louis, Louisville and Wheeling. In October 1848 he sailed for New Orleans and in November went to Texas, then in June 1849 joined Major Van Horn's expedition as assistant wagon-master with the Third Infantry bound for El Paso. In October 1849 he left El Paso with P. Edward Connor, Granville, Orrez, John Lynch, John G. Moore, and James Churchman, on a trip through Chihuahua, Durango, and Sinaloa, to Mazatlan. There they took passage aboard the Two Brothers along with 150 passengers for San Francisco. They arrived here in December 1849 after a passage of thirty-one days. In January 1850 Armstrong went to the mines at Ousley's and Long Bar. Then he moved north in April to the Yuba River above Downieville, and then to Goodyear's Bar. From then on he worked at mining in Sierra, Plumas and Mariposa counties until 1854, in which year he moved to Petaluma, and purchased lots at the corner of Third and F Streets. In July 1857 he entered the water business. When the Civil War was in progress he became second-lieutenant of the Petaluma Guard on June 18, 1862. The following year, August 25, 1863 he was promoted to Captain, August 1864 he became Major of the First Infantry Battalion, California National Guard and served in that capacity until 1868 when he was mustered out of the service. On June 29, 1869 he organized the Heuston Guard, Second Brigade, California National Guard, with the rank of Colonel



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and served for five terms. In 1877, he bought out Mr. Pancher's news-agency. James Armstrong married May 17, 1859, Mary E. Mock, daughter of John L. Mock, of Vallejo township, by whom he had nine children, two of whom died, the remaining ones were six girls and a boy.<sup>19</sup> Soon after settling in Sonoma County, James B. Armstrong took up his 420 acres of redwood timber. He admired and loved the great redwood trees on his land so much that he refused to cut them or sell them. Late in life Colonel Armstrong moved to Cloverdale and was living there at the time of his death in 1900.

The Armstrong Grove of redwoods is a beautiful stand of magnificent trees situated about two and one-half miles north of Guerneville. It is a noble group of Sequoia and practically the only redwood grove of any scenic importance besides the Bohemian Club grove left in the Russian River district or in Sonoma County. It is a splendid forest standing on the level ground and they are still standing because Colonel Armstrong was the owner and insisted on preserving them for public enjoyment.<sup>20</sup>

For some years before his death, as early as March 1892, Colonel Armstrong had been trying to make a gift of

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19. Munro-Fraser, History of Sonoma County, 535-536.

20. F. Rider, Rider's California Guide, 162-169; T. Gregory; History of Sonoma County, 197-198.



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19. Munro-Fraser, History of Sonoma County, 222-223.  
 20. V. Rider, Rider's California Guide, 122-123; T. Gregory,  
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this fine tract of redwoods to the State, but was unable to do so because of the "intricacies of the law" which prevented the State from accepting such gifts. This was before 1900 when there was no Park Commission to accept, manage and care for such gifts. At that time there was no Department of Natural Resources or any State Agency that was non-political and equipped and authorized by legislation to take care of such a situation. Since there was no way in which Colonel Armstrong could deed those 400 acres to the State he held them himself. Then before his death he expressed his wish to his family that they should if possible present the grove to the State as a public park.<sup>21</sup> In order to have it carried out, he had placed the donation in the hands of a board of trustees whose members were: Miss Kate Armstrong, Charles Howard Shinn, Luther Burbank, and Robert N. Johnson. After the Colonel's death the board was still unable to make the gift to the State and did the next best thing. They deeded the 400 acre tract to Sonoma County as a county park to be administered for the benefit of the public. Thus Armstrong Grove continued under county ownership for many years.

In 1910 efforts were made to purchase the Armstrong woods for the State at a price of \$100,000 for use as a State

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21. Sierra Club Bulletin, III, No. 3, February 1901, 266.



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21. Sierra Club Bulletin, III, No. 2, February 1901, 226.



preserve. The effort was partially successful. The proposal to appropriate that amount for the purpose, received the full approval of every conservationist in California. It was endorsed by such organizations as the California State Grange, the State Federation of Women's Clubs, the Outdoor Art League of the California Club, the Sierra Club, Women's Improvement Clubs, and Chambers of Commerce. The money coming from the entire State would have been an infinitesimal addition to individual taxation, and the preservation of a portion of the few remaining trees would have been a noble object. The bill for the purchase passed both houses of the legislature unanimously, but Governor Gillett failed to sign it, so it did not become a law. He gave as his reason the big number of appropriation bills passed at that session, which he considered of more importance. With the failure of the governor to sign the bill to purchase Armstrong Grove, the county had to continue to hold the tract for many years.<sup>22</sup>

Years went by during which nothing was done about Armstrong Woods, but it served as a county recreation area. Then when the State created the State Park Commission to take care of its public parks the idea of acquiring Armstrong Grove for the State was revived. For years after its crea-

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tion the State Park Commission made efforts to acquire the Armstrong Grove from the county, but it could not get the necessary money. Finally it set aside \$30,000 from its funds hoping to receive gifts to an equal amount to match it. In 1934 the State Park Commission was ready to buy Armstrong Redwoods, and that year it received the deed of sale from Sonoma County and that tract was incorporated into the State Park System. Of the original 420 acres acquired by Colonel Armstrong he set aside 400 acres for the county park, but when the Park Commission bought it, only 395.4 acres were acquired. It is estimated that this grove has a stand of 7,000,000 feet of redwood lumber, and is perhaps the finest stand in Sonoma County.<sup>23</sup>

Soon after the Park Commission bought the grove improvements were begun to make it more accessible and more useful to the general public. Much of the underbrush and debris was cleared away. Trails were constructed, water for the convenience of campers and visitors, was piped to the grove, where camp sites were laid out. Seats were constructed out of logs and set about for those who wished to admire the beauties of the grove at their leisure. Then the fine idea was conceived to build an outdoor theater in the park.

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23. Editorial, "Beach Redwoods in Sonoma County new State Park," Motor Land, XXXII, No. 5, May 1934, 8.



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Construction was begun early in 1936 and on September 27, 1936 the world's largest redwood outdoor theater was dedicated and opened to the public at Armstrong Redwood Grove, in Sonoma County by the State Park Commission, while 2,000 men, women and children looked on.

State Senator Herbert W. Slater of Santa Rosa, was the speaker of the day. George D. Nordenholt, director of the Department of Natural Resources represented Governor Frank F. Merriam and G. V. Moir, district manager of the California State Chamber of Commerce was master of ceremonies.

The Santa Rosa Symphony Orchestra, conducted by George J. Trombley, executed a program of classical music that proved the fine acoustic qualities of the great outdoor theater.

Among the guests of honor were officials of various Sonoma County business, civic and governmental organizations which had sponsored the undertaking.<sup>24</sup>

Improvements did not stop there, however, for no sooner was the theater finished than construction on a community house for Armstrong Grove Park, began. The community house was built out of redwood logs and is a fine and comfortable structure. It was completed and dedicated

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on May 23, 1937, eight months after the dedication of the Armstrong Grove Redwood theater.

Surrounded as it is by the towering giants of this redwood grove, the new community house is rapidly becoming a favorite rendezvous of many clubs and other groups from the San Francisco Bay area and other counties.

Through the facilities offered by the two buildings, the theater and community house, the Armstrong Redwoods State Park will soon become one of the most popular state parks in Northern California.

The rustic log-cabin construction of the community house, with its large rock fireplace, and its redwood forest environment has an irresistible lure, the city dweller who would exchange his metropolitan club rooms for country life.

Numerous organizations have used the facilities of the house and the park as a gathering place since they were completed. Among those have been the Inter City Rotary Club, the Russian River Recreational Region Association and its trails and Bridle Path equestrian groups, also several Boy Scout and Campfire Girl units.<sup>25</sup>

The park which is about seventy miles north of San Francisco and three miles north of Guerneville is at present

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25. "Armstrong Park's Community House," California Conservationist, III, No:3, March 1938, 17.



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## ARMSTRONG REDWOOD STATE PARK

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Armstrong Redwoods, 395.4 acre tract near Guerneville, seen by Luis Argüello 1821, also Valléjo, Revere and others by 1846. James Armstrong acquired it after 1850, offering it to California as park 1892-1900, later gave it to Sonoma County. Purchased for \$60,000 and developed as State park by Park Commission 1934.



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Armstrong Redwood Grove is a 395.4 acre tract of land with a fine stand of redwood trees in Sonoma County. It is situated some seventy miles north of San Francisco, about three miles north of Guerneville near the Russian River. Its geographic location is latitude 38° 31' north, longitude 123° west. The grove is on level ground making it a most desirable and ideal spot for a public park.

Exploration in this vicinity began very late. Not until 1821, when Captain Luis Argüello and his expedition were returning from the upper Sacramento Valley, did white men see the Russian River Valley. Further exploration waited until M. G. Vallejo carried on his Indian campaigns in this region between 1836 and 1842. By 1845 several large land grants had been made and ranches had settled the valley that this region became well known.

During October 1846, Lieutenant Joseph Revere from Sonoma traveled through this park region. In February 1850 four members of Dr. Josiah Gregg's expedition to Humboldt Bay returned through these woods almost dead from starvation to Mark West's home at Santa Rosa. After 1850 many people took up the land and timber claims. One of these tracts for



## ARMSTRONG REDWOOD STATE PARK

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Armstrong Redwood Grove is a 598.4 acre tract of land with a fine stand of redwood trees in Sonoma County. It is situated some seventy miles north of San Francisco, about three miles north of Guerneville near the Russian River. Its geographic location is latitude 38° 31' north, longitude 123° west. The grove is on level ground making it a most desirable and ideal spot for a public park. Exploration in this vicinity began very late. Not until 1881, when Captain Luis Arguello and his expedition were returning from the upper Sacramento Valley, did white men see the Russian River Valley. Further exploration waited until M. G. Vallejo started on his Indian campaign in this region between 1858 and 1862. By 1866 several large land grants had been made and ranches had settled the valley that this region became well known. During October 1866, Lieutenant Joseph Hovey from Sonoma traveled through this park region. In February 1880 four members of Dr. Josiah Gregg's expedition to Humboldt Bay returned through these woods almost dead from starvation to Mark West's home at Santa Rosa. After 1880 many people took up the land and timber claims. One of these tracts for



420 acres was acquired by James B. Armstrong, who later gave it to the county as a park.

Formerly this country was occupied by Pomo Indians, a peaceful wealthy, hunting and fishing folk, and the most skillful basket makers in California. They hunted the few species of large animals in the vicinity, such as elk, deer and bear, but there was an abundance of smaller animals. The park area is also very rich in bird life, with such species as quail, doves, wrens, warblers, hawks, sparrows and many kinds of water fowl.

The flora of the park is also varied and profuse. Among the wild flowers are found buttercups, columbines, jump-ups, wild rose, coast lily, fawn lily, lupine and rhododendrons. The trees are represented by such kinds as the willow, cottonwood, black oak, tan oak, white fir, lowland fir, knobcone pine, big leaf maple, madrona, California laurel, and redwood.

Colonel Armstrong loved his grove so well that he refused to sell it and after 1892 tried to deed it to the State for a public park but legal technicalities prevented the acceptance of the gift. At his death in 1900 his heirs made other attempts, and failing, finally donated 400 acres to Sonoma County as a park. In 1910 the legislature passed a bill authorizing the purchase of the park for \$100,000 but



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Governor Gillett refused to sign it. Thereafter nothing was done until 1934, when the State Park Commission bought it from the county for \$60,000.

Since then it has been developed greatly by the building of camp sites, tables, stoves, benches, trails, and the piping of water. In September 1936, a great outdoor theater was completed, and in May 1937, the community house was dedicated. With these facilities the \$70,000 State Park has become a popular recreation center in Sonoma County.



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